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ABSTRACT

Two naturalistic studies examined how children attempt to exert dominance over their peers, which tactics are most frequently used, and which appeals are most successful. The first study identified 3 categories of dominance behavior by a 6-week observation of playground interactions of 20 4- and 5-year-old children. The second study, conducted at the same child care center 5 months later to quantify the findings of study one to provide validity to the inductive constructs, coded 78 domineering behaviors, counted the number of behaviors in each category, the sex of the initiator(s) and target(s) and the success ratios. Results confirmed that verbal assertiveness was the most frequently employed domineering strategy of 4- and 5-year-old children, accounting for 72% of dominance behavior. Successful use of verbal assertion was found most frequently when commands were given by assertive children and when males attempted to dominate females. Domination of same-sexed target and female assertiveness over males were successful slightly more than half of the time. Results also revealed that physical assertiveness (12% occurrence) seemed to serve as a successful means for exerting dominance only when a child was able to exhibit athletic superiority. The most significant finding was the ability of some children to use theme plays to exert dominance over their peers (13% occurrence), a strategy used most often by females who feel confident that the target will play along with the scenario and assume the submissive position. (One table containing the coded domination attempts of children is included; 24 references are attached.) (KEH)

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Peer Persuasion in the Classroom:

A Naturalistic Study of Children's Dominance

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Introduction

For many, the thought of children's dominance creates a vision of the stereotypical bully demanding the milk money of his much smaller victims. However, the construct of dominance has attracted the interest of many scholars who have explored the appeals and tactics of those attempting to dominate others as well as the formation of dominance hierarchies.

Most of this research, however, has taken place outside the communication field and particularly in the areas of psychology and child development. The dominance construct has, in our field, been a popular source for research since the 1970's but, we have primarily relied on studies of adult dominance. Communication scholars can contribute to the understanding of children's dominance by applying the communicative construct, as it has developed in our literature, to the study of children.

Such research would serve the dual scholarly purpose of expanding the understanding of dominance from the developmental and communicative perspectives. Additionally, this research could benefit teachers, counselors, parents and all others concerned with behavioral aspects of children. Therefore, this study will use a naturalistic perspective to examine how children attempt to exert dominance over their peers, which tactics are most frequently used and which appeals are most successful.

Overview of the Dominance Construct

Dominance may be defined both conceptually and operationally. Rogers-Millar and Millar (1979) defined the term as "the resultant phenomenon of the acceptance by alter of the one-up messages given by ego" (p. 240). Domineering behavior, conversely, was defined by Rogers-Millar and Millar as "the transmission of one-up messages" (p. 240). Domineeringness, then, consists of a one-up message that is transmitted from one individual to another, whereas dominance refers to "the transmission of one-up messages that are accepted with one-down statements from the other" (Courtright, Millar, & Rogers-Millar, 1979, p. 181). Therefore, dominance is a dyadic variable whereas domineeringness is a monadic variable. Dominance may be manifested through verbal, nonverbal, and physical behaviors.

As with other constructs in the communication literature, debate exists over whether dominance is best viewed as a trait or as a state. For example, Small, Shepherd Zeldin, and Savin-Williams (1983) provided evidence for a trait conceptualization of dominance. According to the researchers, differences exist between individuals in terms of dominance behaviors which are enacted, "and these differences are consistent across situations and stable over time" (p. 13).

On the other hand, dominance is viewed by some researchers as a state or situational variable. Bernstein

(1980), for example, argued that dominance is not a trait and asserted that it is a relationship between, or among, individuals and is manifested in various social contexts. Bernstein stated that dominance "is the property of an individual only within the context of a specific social organization; it is not a permanent characteristic of the individual" (p. 75).

Dominance relationships are heirarchically structured and are manifested in interactions among individuals (Pickert & Wall, 1981; Sluckin, 1980). For example, Pickert and Wall discovered that children perceived "toughness: as an aggressive characteristic or as a personality trait. Therefore, dominant behaviors such as "toughness" are arranged hierarchically, from most to least tough. The researchers concluded that dominance is a personality trait which influences an individual's behavior in various situations. Dominance heirarchies, according to Strayer and Strayer (1980), contain social power relations among members of various social groups. Thus dominance is viewed as either a trait or a state and research has been conducted in accordance with both of these conceptualizations. In order to effectively investigate dominance behaviors in children, it is necessary to examine children's communication behaviors in general. The next section of the paper will examine the literature on children's communication which is pertinent to the study of children's dominance.

Children and Communication

As with the literature on children's dominance, there is a paucity of research on children's communication. Existing research in this area, however, identifies specific skills which children possess, and the communication strategies that children use in conversations. In addition, this research indicates that children, even at early ages, use influence strategies in their interactions with others.

In a cross-disciplinary review of the literature on children and communication, Wartella and Reeves (1987) identified several conclusions. It was discovered that children begin learning converstational skills at birth, and are treated as partners in communication interactions with their parents. In addition, children acquire and display specific communicative strategies and pragmatic communication behaviors. These behaviors include maintenance of conversational topics, question asking, turn-taking, and so on.

Overall, the research reviewed by Wartella and Reeves (1987) indicates that children are active participants in communication interactions with others. Children's communicative skills develop over time and become more sophisticated as the child becomes more cognitively complex. In addition, the researchers argued that "consideration of communicative development, unlike language development, must include the cultural and social

conventions that provide information and through which children learn to communicate in a social context" (p. 620-621). Thus, children are active, thinking participants in their own communicative development, and there are many variables to be considered when studying children's communication behaviors.

Haslett (1983b) advocated a functional analysis approach to studying the communicative functions and strategies used by children. She argued that functional analyses are superior to speech act analyses because the latter do not provide the needed theoretical basis for examining developmental pragmatics. Haslett discovered that there were developmental differences in the various functions and strategies used by preschool children in their interactions with one another.

Specifically, the results of Haslett's (1983b) research indicated that a developmental pattern of language use was exhibited through the strategies used by children to achieve their conversational goals. The preschoolers who were studied were found to use projective and relational language functions predominantly. According to Haslett, the projective and relational functions "emphasize socially adapted speech; that is, these functions incorporate dialogue that is necessary to support mutual play activities or to deal interpersonally with another" (p. 124).

Thus, children's language use develops from an

individualistic to an interpersonal point of view. The preschoolers were also found to use directive and interpretative language functions. The particular functions of language which were used tended to vary according to the child's age, however. For example, the relational and interpretative functions were used more than the directive and projective functions by 3-year-olds, reflecting the children's need to verbally control their environment and to meet their egocentric needs. Haslett (1983b) concluded that children's language functions "become increasingly complex, both cognitively and communicatively, over time. This strongly suggests that pragmatic language functions are linked to the child's cognitive as well as social growth" (p. 128).

In a separate study, Haslett (1984) explained the development of pragmatic communication among children, which occurs in four stages. In the first stage, infants recognize that communication forms the basis for the establishment of interpersonal relationships among individuals. In the second stage, children begin to understand such things as turn taking in converstations and intentionality of communication, and learn to use language to accomplish social goals. The third stage represents the period when children begin to adapt their communicative strategies according to who they talk to and in what setting. The final stage is characterized by an evaluation of the adequacy of both one's own and others' communication

messages.

Haslett (1984) argued for a communication based approach to the study of children's communication development. This is based on the assertion that "the study of pragmatics should be viewed as the study of communication- not language" (p. 253). Working from this viewpoint, she has provided a model which outlines the development of pragmatic communication among children. This model illustrated that the development of communication skills is closely aligned with language acquistion and with the social and cognitive abilities of children. Thus, even at very early ages, children develop an awareness of themselves and others as communicators, and also become aware of the various contexts in which they communicate. Having examined the research on children's communication, the review will now turn to an investigation of the relevant literature on children's conceptions of persuasion and children's use of persuasive skills.

Children and Persuasion

Research on children and persuasion indicates that individuals develop and employ persuasive skills in childhood. This research also reveals that children both develop and respond to persuasive appeals in various social contexts. Children use these skills in order to exert influence over others in their environment.

In an investagation of children's conceptions of both adult and peer authority, Laupa and Turiel (1986)

discovered that legitimacy of authority influenced responses to commands. The researchers interviewed 48 elementary school students enrolled in either the first, third, or fifth grade. Results revealed that the children were able to conceptualize the role of authority and accepted legitimate peer as well as adult authorities. Specifically, when legitimizing authority, children take into account both the social context and the status of the individual giving a command. The children prioritized their perceptions based on the age of the individual giving a command, and the presence of legitimate authority. Thus, peers and nonauthority figures were given less priority in terms of obeying commands.

Laupa and Turiel (1986) asserted that the findings of their research indicate a need to differentiate obedience and legitimacy when assessing conceptions of authority. Children apparently distinguish between these dimensions, and tend to consider them separately from one another. Nevertheless, the researchers concluded that children do indeed prioritize their conception of, and subsequent obedience to, authority figures.

The development of persuasive skills among children and adolescents was examined by Clark and Delia (1976). Interviews were conducted with 58 children in grades two through nine. The researchers discovered that, as children grow older, they develop role taking abilities and their use of persuasive strategies therefore becomes more

sophisticated. That is, higher-order strategies and more total arguments were used by the older children who were interviewed than by the younger children. The researchers concluded that, "as children mature they employ a set of persuasive strategies which reflect a more sophisticated ability to understand and adapt to the perspective of the other" (p. 1013).

Clark, O'Dell, and Willihnganz (1986) obtained results similar to the results of Clark and Delia (1976). The researchers examined children's use of compromise as an alternative to persuasive communicaton. They wished to determine whether a child, as he/she gets older, tends "to suggest compromise rather than to seek agreement with an initial desire in situations in which the child's needs and wants conflict with those of the other interactant" (p. 221). Interviews were conducted with 127 third, fourth, and sixth graders. Results revealed that the use of compromise as an alternative to persuasion was reported more often by the older children who were interviewed.

Clark, et. al. (1986) asserted that, as children mature, they develop more strategies for suggesting compromise. They concluded that, "the individual learns to accommodate the desire of other individuals and at the same time to pursue his/her own objectives in a variety of situations" (p. 223). Thus, with maturity comes a greater potential for meeting one's own interaction objecteves, while at the same time giving consideration to another

individuals' goals.

Bearison and Gass (1979) discovered that children between the ages of 10 and 11 1/2 possess the ability to recognize and utilize persuasive appeals in both hypothetical and practical social contexts. The children interviewed were asked to persuade someone to give them a small sum of money ($2.00). Thus, in the practical contexts, the children had an actual opportunity to earn the money.

The researchers discovered that children used more persuasive appeals in the practical than in the hypothetical situations. Simple requests were most often used in the hypothetical situations, followed by self-interest and other-directed requests. Mutual gain requests were not used in the hypothetical situations. In the practical contexts, self-interest requests were most often used, followed by other-directed and mutual gain requests. Simple requests were not used at all in the practical contexts. In a similar investigation of persuasive appeals, Jones (1985) discovered that children of all ages most frequently employed simple requests. Interviews were conducted with 109 elementary school aged children. An example of simple request was, "May I have it please?" Self- and other-oriented appeals were used less frequently. A self-oriented approach consisted of statements such as "I need to use the crayon; give it to me," while an other-oriented appeal consisted of a compromise.

Children were also more likely to grant requests in response to the persuasive appeals of friends rather than acquaintances. In addition, when requests were denied, the refusals were extended more for friends than for acquaintances. For example, acquaintances were refused with statements such as a curt "No," whereas friends were provided with an expanded explanation for the refusal.

The final section of the literature review will attempt to provide a link between children's communicative behaviors, persuasion, and dominance. In doing so, children's perceptions of dominance behaviors will be examined, as will research on children's use of such behaviors. Research on dominance heirarchies among children and adolescents will be examined as well.

Children and Dominance

Research on children's communication which was reviewed previously in the present paper indicated that children begin to develop and utilize communicative skills in infancy (Haslett, 1984). This developmental process of communication acquisition includes the use of dominant behaviors. This section of the paper will focus on research related to children's communication dominance behaviors.

Strayer and Strayer (1980) observed dominance behaviors in preschool children bewteen three and five years of age. They found that physical attacks, threats, and object/position struggles were all exhibited as forms of social dominance. Specifically, physical attacks that

occurred most often were hitting and pushing or pulling. The researchers stressed the notion that dominance was an interactive activity and research must focus on both participants in the interaction. They stated that, "This approach implicitly assumes that dominance between two individuals is established by a mutual agreement symbolized by the submissive response" (p. 154-155).

In an analysis of children's perceptions of dominance, Pickert and Wall (1981) conceptually defined dominance as "manipulation and control of other's behavior" (p. 75). Dominance was operationally defined as "toughness" and "getting one's own way" (p. 76). The children surveyed in the study defined toughness as an aggressive characteristic and said that a tough person was one who was stronger and meaner and often fought with other children.

The children were asked to rank themselves and their peers on both toughness and getting one's own way as dimensions of dominance. Such rankings reflect the heirarchical nature of the dominance construct. The children surveyed in this study were able to construct dominance heirarchies in order to describe their own and their peers' behaviors. Results revealed that the children consistently overranked themselves and others on toughness. In addition, males were ranked higher than females on both the toughness and getting one's own way dimensions.

Pickert and Wall (1981) thus concluded that the children's descriptions indicated that dominance was viewed

as hierarchical and in terms of two dimensions. Specifically, the children suggested that dominance was both an outcome in terms of individuals getting their own way, and also as a trait which was manifested in the display of tough behaviors. The researchers asserted, then, that dominacne was not accurately described as multi-dimensional rather than unidimensional and should be studied accordingly.

In another study on perceptions of dominance, Silverman (1984) investigated self-, peer, and teacher ratings of dominant behaviors. She discovered the the self-, peer, and teacher ratings revealed no consistent patterns. That is, the assessment of dominance among the three groups of individuals were divergent. These results are contradictory with the findings of Pickert and Wall (1981), indicating the need for further research on perceptions of dominance.

Sluckin (1980) investigated the existence of dominance hierarchies among preschool children. He discovered that dominance hierarchies do indeed exist and actually begin to develop at about four years of age. Further, Sluckin found that children were able to recognize both dominant behaviors and the existence of dominance hierarchies in dyads not involving themselves. As Sluckin stated, "It is clear that a behavioral dominance hierarchy is a valid description of the social structure that the child is experiencing" (p. 175).

Savin-Williams (1979) investigated dominance

hierarchies in early adolescents. He discovered that, among 12- to 14-year old males and females, dominance hierarchies were significantly correlated with rank orderings of the adolescents' leadership, physical maturity, and athletic ability. Results also revealed that males were more likely to display physically assertive behaviors, while females exhibited verbal evaluative behaviors. This finding indicates a need to examine gender differences in the display of dominant behaviors.

In a separate but related study, Savin-Williams (1980) examined dominance hierarchies in middle to late adolescent males. As with the previous study, it was found that dominance heirarchies developed among the adolescents, but the hierarchies were no longer correlated with leadership, physical maturity, and athletic ability. Among the 14-to 17-year olds who were studied, dominance rankings were correlated with such things as intelligence, popularity with peers, creativity, and so on.

Thus, physical expressions of dominance were less likely to occur among the older adolescents, and were replaced by such things as intelligence, popularity, and creative skills. Savin-Williams attributed this finding to similarities stature among late adolescent males. In other words, when disequalities in physical size can no longer be relied upon to naturally express dominance, individuals find other means of displaying this type of social influence.

The purpose of this secton has been to review the

literature on children's dominance. In doing so, literature on the dominance construct, children's communicaton, and children's use of persuasion has also been reviewed. Much of the research on children's dominance has been conducted outside of the communication discipline. Therefore, such research has not focused on the specific communication behaviors which are used by children to achieve dominance over others.

An examination of the specific communication behaviors which children use to display dominance over others would provide a valuable contribution to the existing literature in this area. Research conducted in naturalistic settings would also prove to be beneficial. Naturalistic research will provide a more accurate depiction of dominant episodes which occur in children's communication interactions. According to Savin-Williams, Small, and Shepherd Zelden (1981), "the direct observation of behavior has greater face validity than self-report measures since it is based on how an individual actually behaves in specific situations" (p. 175).

Method

The researchers chose to base this project in the naturalistic perspective. The first study used naturalistic observation to identify dominance and domineering behavior in subjects. The second study was an extension of the first. The first study identified three categories of dominance behavior. The researchers

developed a checklist of these categories and, in the second study, counted the number of behaviors in each category, the sex of the initiator(s) and target(s) and the success ratios.

The naturalistic method was selected with the assumption that, by allowing the researcher(s) to become members of the groups being studied, the clearest interpretation and understanding of how children dominate or attempt to dominate peers would be reached.

The naturalistic paradigm, and methods for its implementation, has most recently been presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Lincoln and Guba asserted the naturalistic paradigm constitutes post-positivism. Some of the differences between the two paradigms were pointed out with the following conflicting axioms. First, concerning ontology, the positivists consider reality to be single, tangible and fragmentable whereas the naturalist assumes multiple realities which are constructed and holistic. Second, the positivist considers the knower and the known to be independent but, the naturalist views them as interactive and inseparable. The positivist paradigm allows for cause-effect linkages whereas the naturalist believes all entities simultaneously shape each other. Finally, positivists seek value-free inquiry whereas naturalistic inquiry is value bound.

Naturalistic study allows the researcher to build upon his or her tacit knowledge through the use of "humanly

implemented" methods. These methods include: interviews, observations, document analysis, unobtrusive clues, etc. Lincoln and Guba note "naturalistic studies are virtually impossible to design in any definitive way before the study is actually undertaken" (p. 187). However, the research will consist of four basic steps: "purposive sampling, inductive analysis of the data obtained from the sample, development of grounded theory based on the inductive analysis and projection of next steps in a constantly emerging design" (p. 199-211). Final reporting of data from a naturalistic study often takes the form of a case report. However, reporting of the data for this study will take the form of inductive constructs. This method is consistent with Anderson's recommendations for reporting data of qualitative research (p. 47). This will allow conclusions to be formed in a manner similiar to traditional communication research reports while maintaining the case report advantage of thick description.

Design of Study

The research for this study was conducted at a child care center in southeastern Ohio. The researcher, in study one, observed communicative behavior between three and five days a week for a six week period. The participant observation allowed the researcher to both watch dyadic interactions from a short distance and become involved in discussions and games. This interaction was essential to the interpretation of observed behavior.

The researcher kept a daily journal of observations. The field notes were done in a manner not to attract attention or make the subjects aware that they were being observed. Additionally, counselors at the child care center frequently took notes, therefore the researcher's field note-taking would not seem unusual. After each observation period the researcher recorded, in detail, the days' observations along with perceived developing trends in dominant or domineering behavior. The researcher periodically referred to the field notes to develop and modify inductive constructs. The constructs were the results of the study which help explain how children exert dominance over their peers.

This study relied on Courtright, Millar and Rogers-Millar's definitions of dominance and domineering behavior. Dominance was defined as "the transmission of one-up messages that are accepted with one-down statements from the other" (Courtright, Millar & Rogers-Millar, 1979). Domineering was defined as "the transmission of one-up messages" (Courtright, Millar & Rogers-Millar). During observation the researcher noted each domineering attempt and the target's response. A judgment was then made to classify the transaction as domineering or dominance. The researcher's primary concern was in identifying verbal exchanges. Specifically, vocal volume, verbal aggressiveness and directives were thought to be important behaviors for observation. However, the researcher's chose

not to limit observation to these particular variables. The researchers were also concerned with identifying how play activities such as athletic ability, leadership and participation supported ones' efforts in dominance.

Study two used the three emergent inductive constructs, from study one, to develop a checklist. The second study involved a six-week observation period in which the researchers tallied domineering attempts according to the construct being used, the sex of the dominator(s) and target(s) and whether the attempt was successful. The purpose of this study was to quantify the findings of study one thus providing validity to the inductive constructs.

Subjects

Study one included approximately 20 children between the ages of four and five- years- old. Attendence each day would fluctuate slightly. However, the same 20 children remained enrolled in the child care center throughout the study. There was an equal number of males and females and all subjects appeared to be from middle to upper-middle income homes. The subjects were observed while at play in an enclosed playground. The playground included a swingset, monkey bars, a large tunnel, sand box, small equipment shed, a slide and loft and several surrounding trees. The children were supervised by three or four counselors of which the researcher was thought to be one. The children were allowed to play quiet or running games and several toys were provided. The counselors served to

initiate and supervise games as well as manage conflicts and provide general supervision over activities.

Study two was conducted at the same child care center five months after study one. The same age group was observed which included five of the same children from study one. There was a total of approximately 15 children present each day. For study two, the observation was conducted during indoor play times to see if the dominance behaviors would be the same as those observed outside.

The indoor facilities consisted of one large room with several distinct activity areas. These areas included a computer station, sand box, painting area, sink, loft with stairs, reading center and open play area. The indoor facility was also supervised by 3 or 4 counselors. The activities were slightly more structured as groups of children were schedualed for craft time and foreign language tutoring.

Results

Results for study one were developed by close examination of the field note texts and development of episodes which provide descriptive sample accounts of observed behavior. Specifically, the researcher identified verbal assertiveness, physical assertiveness and theme plays as constructs of children's dominance. The acceptence, rejection or explanations of these constructs were found in the observation of children's attempts to exert a one-up behavior which would be followed by a one-down behavior from

the target.

Verbal Assertiveness

In this study directives, commands, arguments and raising the voice constituted strategies for exerting dominance. The early stages of the study found many examples of subjects exerting dominance and achieving a desired response or action through the use of directives. Most examples were simple cases of "give me ...", "go get ..." or "hand me ..." which attempted to monitor the actions of others. One game of particular interest was wiffle ball batting while the researcher pitched the ball. One male was able to direct the action of another male by stating "give me a turn". Another example found a female directing her friend to "follow me" to the monkey bars. These initial findings proved to be misleading. After reviewing field notes of several observations it was apparent that directives were not used exclusively by dominant children. All except the most reserved children attempted to employ directives. Additionally, unsuccessful uses of dominance were as frequent as successful attempts.

Commands were found to be used more exclusively by dominant children and were more assertive than directives. The most frequent cases were commands designed to make another complete a task or stop doing something. One boy was able to successfully command another to "stop throwing it (a frisbee) over here". These appeals were used less frequently and by fewer subjects but with a much higher

success rate than directives because only the more confident children were willing to use commands.

The only rejection occurred when strong commands were directed at children who were also dominant. These situations generally found the persuader being ignored by the target or the two became involved in a discussion with both making demands but neither willing to be subordinate. One dominant girl told another dominant girl to leave the area. The second girl refused and both continued to give reasons why the other should leave. This discussion was soon halted by one of the counselors.

Arguing and yelling were both used less frequently than directives and commands. These observations generally ended with neither subject clearly exerting dominance over the other. Either the two subjects in conflict were too committed to their stance to back down or the situation was halted by counselors. The only clear case of dominance being exerted through these means occured when a subject who had a much higher position in the dominance hierarchy yelled at someone in a lower position. Attempts at yelling up the hierarchy never succeeded.

Physical Assertiveness

Observation revealed three domineering techniques employed by subjects with only one having a high success rate. Pushing, shoving and object struggles along with game or activity participation had mixed results when used to exert dominance. However, athletic superiority was

sucessfully used by capable subjects to gain dominance over their peers.

Surprisingly, episodes of pushing, shoving and struggling over objects rarely resulted in one subject exerting dominance over the other. In cases of pushing and shoving the result was usually a short-lived struggle which was ended by a counselor or with both subjects stopping the conflict and arguing without conceding to the other. Object struggles consisted of fighting over a single toy and attempts by one to acquire a toy from another. Fights over single toys resulted in some sort of compromise or a mutual disinterest in the object. Again, this interaction was usually shortened or controlled by a counselor.

One instance found two boys fighting over a small shovel. The first had been digging a hole in the sand and the second approached him and said "here, let me do it now". With this he grabbed the shovel. The first boy attempted to grab it back as a counselor approached the two and worked out a compromise. Males were more likely to engage in these struggles and cases of mixed sex struggles were rare. The most violent struggle, however, was between a male and female and ended with neither emerging as more dominant.

A few of the more assertive subjects attempted to exert dominance by controlling games and activities. This occurred while playing games which required everyone to wait their turn. Only one child was consistently successful with this tactic. He was very assertive in his

requests and almost always excelled in the activity. Other subjects only had moderate success when attempting to control activities.

There was some indication that athletic superiority helped subjects exert dominance. Boys who were good in sporting activities, such as batting, were able to assume a dominant role by telling others how to hit the ball. The strongest indication of athletics leading to dominance was seen by the desire of children to run after others. The subjects who were faster than most others were able to entice a group into running after them. After finally being caught, or after the chase grew old, the one being chased succeeded in determining the next activity or telling the chasers to stop running or to go away.

Theme Play

The most consistently successful means of domination was exhibited by subjects who develop theme plays with the target in a subordinate position. We offer the concept of theme play as describing a behavior different than role play. Theme plays occur when a child offers a play situation which allows him/her to have a position of dominance of the playmate(s).

Most theme play attempts were initiated by females over females. Male initiated theme plays quickly turned into play without a specific individual guiding the actions of others. When females tried to engage males in theme plays the success rate was lower. The males either lost interest

or played out the role without the guidance of the initiator. The greatest number of theme plays involved mother-daughter and big sister-little sister interactions. One girl frequently approached smaller girls and proposed that they play house. She would always suggest "I'll be the mom and you be the baby". The target would agree and "mom" would generally command "now you lay down and go to sleep" and the target would comply. Other themes included a queen and her servants and a ship captain and her shipmates.

Theme play initiators would assign positions or roles and begin the action by only allowing the partner(s) submissive responses. The initiator did this in one of two ways. First, she would make a request of the target such as "dig more" or "get out of the water." Second, the initiator could talk down to the target such as "now be quiet baby" or "you're a bad little sister".

These theme plays were only enacted by more outgoing females and the researcher noticed that the theme play would stop as soon as the initiator lost interest but rarely before that. There were very few cases of theme play attempts not working. Theme plays were initiated by those near the top of the dominance hierarchy and their targets were ranked below them. They were also successful because the roles provided a form of play that was enjoyable for all who participated and the less dominant subjects did not mind assuming lower status roles.

Study Two

A total of 78 domineering behaviors were coded in study two. A chart of the final tallies for study two is provided in Appendix A. The researchers coded 56 verbal domineering attempts which constituted 72 percent of all observed behaviors. The greatest number of verbal domineering attempts (22) was found with a single male dominator and single male target. The success rate was modest as 12 of the 22 attempts (55%) allowed the initiator to receive a sumbissive response from the target but the other 10 attempts failed. Similar results were found for single female dominators with single female targets. Of the 14 attempts, eight were successful (57%) and six unsuccessful.

There were four cases of single male verbal assertiveness over single females and 13 cases of single female attempts directed at a single male. All four of the male attempts were successful whereas eight females succeeded and five failed. There were only three cases of a subject attempting to exert verbal dominance over more than one child at a time. A male was successful in exerting dominance over two females but another male was unsuccessful with a male and female target. On one occasion, a female successfully exerted dominance over two other females.

There were 12 cases of physical domineering behavior which accounted for 15 percent of all coded behaviors.

Only four of these domineering attempts were successul (33%). Eight of the 12 attempts were initiated by a single male upon a single male target. Three attempts were successful but five did not result in a sumbissive response (38%). The final four physical domineering attempts were initiated by females against a single target. Three females attempted to physically dominate another female but all three attempts were unsuccessful. However, one female did successfully physically dominate a male target.

Ten cases of subjects initiating a role play to exert dominance were coded by the researchers. This accounted for the final 12 percent of the 78 total observed behaviors. All 10 role plays were successful. Eight of the role plays were initiated by females. Three of these role plays had a single female target and another three had a single male target. One role play had two females as targets while the final female initiated role play had a male and a female as the targets. One of the male initiated role plays had a single male target and the other had a single female target.

Discussion

Studies one and two confirm that verbal assertiveness is the most frequently employed domineering strategy of four and five -year -olds. Almost all subjects in study one attempted to use directives and 72 percent of the observed behaviors in study two were forms of verbal assertiveness. Successful uses of verbal assertion were found most frequently when commands were given by assertive children

and when males attempted to dominate females. Domination of same-sexed targets were successful slightly more than half of the time and female verbal assertiveness over males was also successful 61 percent of the time. Overall, verbal assertiveness was used the most but the use of commands was the only tactic which was frequently successful.

A possible explanation for the success of commands is found when referring to Laupa and Turiel's (1986) finding that children consider age, status and persuader tactics when deciding whether or not to comply. The children in study one who employed commands were more confident and outgoing in their interactions with others. Their targets may have viewed their status as a type of leader and the command tactic as one that should be obeyed. The use of commands, and other less successful verbal strategies, does not, however, show the ability to adapt messages as Clark, O'Dell and Willihnganz and O'Keefe and Delia found in older children.

Physical assertiveness seemed to serve as a successful means for exerting dominance only when a child was able to exhibit athletic superiority. Study one indicated that most other physical assertiveness techniques were unsuccessful and study two showed that physical tactics were used far less frequently than verbal techniques. This would seem to support Haslett's conclusion that although five -year -olds are still egocentric their communicative ability has greatly progressed since age three.

Savin-Williams found that 12 to 14 -year -old males and females relied on maturity, athletic ability and group leadership to determine ones' place in the dominance hierarchy. The emphasis placed on these physical qualities did not appear in her study of 14 to 18 -year -olds. The present study indicates that the emphasis of athletic ability on dominance hierarchy position may develop at a much earlier stage than previously realized. Apparently, four and five -year -olds' enjoyment of play activity carries with it a respect and admiration for those who excel in games.

Studies one and two provided significant reason to believe that the most extreme forms of verbal and physical assertiveness are not successful when used by children to exert dominance over peers. Neither arguing and yelling nor pushing, shoving and fighting over objects resulted in one child successfully exerting dominance over another.

The most insightful finding in this study was the ability of some children to use theme plays to exert dominance over their peers. The success rate of theme plays (100%) combined with their limited use (13% of all behaviors in study two) would suggest that this strategy is only employed by children who feel confident that the target will play along with the scenario and assume the submissive position.

Previous research poses a few partial explanations for the theme play phenomenon. Haslett's research has shown

that children learn to use persuasive appeals around age four but are still ego-centric at age five. The theme play users in these studies may be emerging from their ego-centric stage and beginning to develop the early signs of perspective taking ability. These children, in turn, select peers who may still be ego-centric. The theme play initiator can formulate a play scenario and provide roles or characters for all those involved. The ego-centric child can then function in the scenario because their position has been established for them.

This explanation would suggest that children not only develop perspective taking, but perspective assigning abilities as well. This ability allows the child to transform a play situation into a dominance situation by assigning subordinate roles to peers. The theme play, when seen as a means for assigning perspectives, is used as a higher order form of influence. Delia, Kline and Burleson (1979) summarized "developmentally, more sophisticated persuasive messages may be legitimately regarded as those which reflect higher levels of social perspective-taking" (p. 242).

The question left unexplained, thus far, is why were females much more likely than males to use theme plays. The simple explanation may be that girls are more interested than boys in developing theme plays. However, the reasoning behind this may suggest that girls develop the perspective-taking and perspective-assigning ability sooner than boys.

Whereas study two showed males and females attempted the same number of verbal dominance attempts (28 each) and males attempted twice as many physical attempts at dominance (eight to four) the role play construct which required the greatest cognitive complexity was dominanted by females eight to two.

Future research in children's dominance should consider three elements of our findings. First, we have proposed the use of theme play as a means for exerting dominance. This is a tactic newly associated with children's dominance and its validity should be tested further. Second, we announced the ability of children to assign perspectives. This also is a twist to traditional views of perspective taking and should be examined. Finally, we attempted to explain why females are much more likely to use theme plays than males but we do not claim to have provided the final answer to this question. One might begin to address this question with a study designed specifically to determine if young girls are superior to boys in perspective taking and perspective assigning.

Insights for kindergarten teachers

The findings of this study provide insights into the ways kindergarten age children exert dominance over their peers. These findings can be used by kindergarten teachers to recognize situations which might lead to one child influencing another. The teacher can also create situations which would allow children the opportunity to

exert influence. This section will highlight insights for kindergarten teachers dealing with their student's use of verbal assertativeness, physical assertativeness and theme plays.

Kindergarten teachers will probably not be suprised by the finding that verbal assertativeness is the most frequently employed verbal dominance srtategy. However, teachers should be aware that commands, as opposed to requests or yelling, is the most successful strategy and it is used by more confident and outgoing children. Furthermore, males and females are equally likely to exert verbal dominance.

Teachers can limit the opportunities for children to use commands by avoiding the use of dyads. In larger groups, children will be less likely to use commands. When children are placed together the teacher can limit the possibility of one dominating another by putting them in mixed-sex dyads. The teacher should also recognize that more outgoing children are going to attempt verbal assertiveness more often. Therefore, submissive children should not be frequently left unattended with more dominant kids.

Kindergarten teachers may be suprised by the inportance athletics and physical activity plays in children's dominance. Pushing, shoving and struggles are not nearly as successful for children attempting to exert dominance than the opportunities that arise from athletic and

physical superiority. This places a unique burden on the kindergarten teacher.

The ability for older students to use physical superiority to exert dominance is familiar to educators. Previous research has shown that 12 to 14 year -olds used athletic ability to exert dominance. Likewise, we are aware of the dangers of allowing children to choose teams for games. The inferior athletes are chosen last and can experience a lack of self-confidence. However, this study has shown that even kindergarten children will use athletic ability to exert dominance. Therefore, their teacher should be aware that those who win athletic games may also use their success to exert dominance over others. Teachers should also play physical activities that down play the winning aspect of athletics. The New Games approach should be employed for kindergarten children. These games de-emphasize winning and will limit the possibility of children dominating others. Teachers should also try to provide other means of self-concept developing activities for athletically inferior to average students.

Previous research has not addressed children's use of theme plays to exert dominance and we believe this may be new to kindergarten teachers as well. Teachers must be aware that their students can exert dominance by means other than verbal and physical assertiveness. Theme plays represent a much more subtle form of dominance which may escape the teacher's notice.

Teachers can use theme plays to give shy children an easier way to become more outgoing. Teachers could initiate theme plays and place a quiet child in the dominance position, i.e. mother, father, boss. By giving each student a role to play the shy child may feel more comfortable speaking up and influencing their peers.

This paper has taken a naturalistic approach to the study of children's dominance. Results were discussed in the categories of verbal assertativeness, physical assertativeness and theme plays. Results in the first two categories helped to explain and extend issues of the dominance construct addressed by other researchers. The use of theme plays, however, appears to be a new insight in children's dominance worthy of further investigation. The study was then completed with suggestions for kindergarten teachers.

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APPENDIX A

m/f		verbal	physical	role play
m	S	12	3	1
m	U	10	5	
m	S	4		1
f	U			
m	S			
m,m	U			
m	S	1		
f,f	U			
m	S			
m,f	U	1		
f	S	8		3
f	U	6	3	
f	S	8	1	3
m	U	5		
f	S	1		1
f,f	U			
f	S			
m,m	U			
f	S			1
m,f	U			

Note: S=successful, U=unsuccessful.